

SOME NOTES ON THE ASSASSINS' BATONS OF MALAITA.

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(Plate IX.)

MALAITA, the largest and most densely populated island in the British Solomon Group, is one of the few localities at the present time left unexplored. Truly wonderful rewards await the scientific explorers who have the courage to face and overcome the difficulties lying in the path of those who would penetrate and probe the mysteries of these superstitious, wild, savage, and murderous people who dwell in the dark forests and mountain retreats of that beautiful island. A hundred miles long and twenty-five across, the island appears from the sea to be one vast forest, which, clothing the sides of a thousand hills, rises to far-off mountains. Through the jungle and glades of this dark forest there swarms a silent, desperate, cruel, and treacherous people. They kill and are killed, and feast on human flesh.

The bush people and mountaineers for generations past have waged a deadly feud with the coastal tribes, and stray trespassers on one another's territories, if surprised, meet with instant death, or, if captured alive, with a lingering death of torture. At stated times, by mutual consent, hostilities are suspended, and the sea-coast and country parties meet on neutral ground set apart as market places, where their women exchange and barter their varied produce and commodities, under the protection of armed guards of men from both sides.

The mixture of races on Malaita is also indicated by the variety of weapons and implements used in warfare and hunting, as well as the ornaments adopted for personal adornment. Whereas in most islands throughout the Solomon Group the natives confine themselves to particular kinds of lethal weapons, discarding all others, the Malaitans employ all the offensive weapons commonly used by all races inhabiting the neighbouring and adjacent islands, such as clubs and wooden swords of various designs, together with spears, bows and arrows, slings and stones, as well as daggers made from wood, shell, and bone. Many of their arrows and some of their spears, in workmanship, are peculiar to Malaita, but most of the other weapons have their counterpart in different islands. But the baton-shaped implements shown in the illustration of some of the specimens in the Queensland Museum are peculiar to the southern district of Malaita only. They are known by repute but never seen in any of the northern or central parts of the island, and they are quite unknown in any other part of the Pacific. On the south-east coast of the island they get the name of "Hau," and on the

